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DE RUEHBU #1751/01 2471943
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 041943Z SEP 07
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9133
INFO RHMFISS/CDR USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL//SCJ2//
RULGPIA/USCOMSOLANT

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 001751

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STATE FOR INR/R/MR, I/GWHA, WHA, WHA/PDA, WHA/BSC,
WHA/EPSC
CDR USSOCOM FOR J-2 IAD/LAMA

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; PRESIDENT CHAVEZ AND COLOMBIA; PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH; 09/04/07

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Weekend international stories include implications of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez' attempts to mediate between FARC and the Colombian Government; and the possible reasons for US President Bush's visit to Iraq.

2. OPINION PIECES AND EDITORIALS

- "Chvez to the rescue?"

Paul Scheltus, liberal, English-language "Buenos Aires Herald's" international columnist, writes (09/04) "... About a fortnight ago, Hugo Chavez offered to mediate in Colombia, the scene of Latin America's longest running guerrilla insurgency. That offer was welcomed by the FARC guerrillas...

"... The aim of the negotiations is clear. The release of 45 hostages being held by FARC... will be in return for the release of hundreds of its troops.

"Should Chavez manage to broker a deal, it would make him something of a Latin American Kofi Annan. He would be succeeding where the French, the Spanish, the Swiss and the Catholic Church have failed. That's because dealing with FARC is a tricky business.

"... Hostage brokering is not the only difficult piece of negotiating that Chavez is applying his newfound diplomatic skills to. Fearing Venezuela may eventually be blackballed from Latin America's most prosperous trade group, Mercosur, the former colonel has said he wants to rejoin the Andean Pact or CAN, made of Peru, Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador. That same Chavez left the CAN in a huff in May last year, claiming the organization was 'dead.' Soon after that, he showed up at the front door of Mercosur. He was initially welcomed... but since then his popularity has taken a turn for the worse...

"... So now Hugo Chavez is forced into and about face and rejoin the old CAN... Venezuela's look to joining the Andean Pact is positive. Ecuador and Bolivia are ideological allies in the common cause of reaching out to Latin America's disenfranchised. Peru, which had its feathers ruffled by Chavez during its presidential elections, has welcomed Venezuela... Finally, Colombia is not an obstacle, especially now that the Bolivarian has assumed the role of peace broker. Despite the good omens through, Chavez may still feel cheated in the end.

"... For Colombia, getting the deal approved hinges on Uribe's ability to convince the Democrat majority in the US Congress that he can be trusted on human rights issues.

"The irony of the situation is that, should Chavez manage to broker a deal between FARC and the Uribe government, in doing so he would be greatly increasing the chances of that free trade deal - which he despises - coming about."

- "The gesture of a president that seeks to put an end to his deterioration"

Oscar Ral Cardoso, international analyst of leading "Clarn," opines (09/04) "Was it an audacious political gesture or a public affairs response? This seems to be the real meaning of George W. Bush's surprising visit to Al Asad military headquarters in Northern Iraq."

"The truth is that both possibilities are not mutually exclusive. President Bush needs to generate situations aimed at putting a brake on the deterioration of his second major announcement on Iraq... that sending additional troops could contribute to improving the situation and stop the incipient civil war between the Shiite majority and the Sunni minority."

"... Bush even made a nice 'quasi-announcement.' In the event the situation continues to improve, he said, it will be possible to start thinking of a future reduction in the number of soldiers trapped in the Iraqi sands... His spokespersons attempted to downplay the impact of his words by saying that it is still too soon to interpret his comments as a formal announcement."

"The other problem is that the validity of General Petraeus' report is being questioned even before its content is made public."

"... Additionally, George W. Bush's task in Iraq is becoming increasingly complicated. Not only Democrats are pressuring the White House but also some Republicans, who have been loyal up to now, and now fear that the problem could impair their performance in presidential elections."

"Perhaps, one does not need to overanalyze the symbols of this new Bush trip to Iraq. Perhaps it is advisable to interpret it as the beginning of a new stage in the debate on a war that many in the US consider they can no longer win."

- "Bush's 'soldiers'"

Santiago O'Donnell, international analyst of left-of-center "Pgina 12," opines (09/02) "... (Albert) Gonzales fell precisely due to the (federal) prosecutors scandal and the pressure of a Democrat controlled Congress. (Both Rove and Gonzalez worked towards the degeneration of the US judiciary by politically moving it through blacklists and layoffs)..."

"The US election map is divided into the Democratic North and the Republican South as never before, and Capitol Hill has not reached a bipartisan deal in a very long time. This is Bush's legacy on the US domestic agenda and Rove is the best symbol."

"When the world's superpower legalizes torture and creates a subhuman category to deal with combatant enemies, it loses moral authority and when this happens it loses leadership..."

"... Rove, Gonzales, Rumsfeld and Cheney were influential and powerful men with radical ideas and agendas that led the US to a military defeat, an economy with a mega-deficit, a major political crisis and international isolation. One after the other fell under the weight of history; all of them were Bush soldiers down to the last minute."

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